

# The School Board Corner

By Ed Sullivan, George Washington District  
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Spring is here, and we are enjoying the warmth and beauty that comes with it. Also by now the School Budget is in place, and we know what next year will look like. From the many e-mails and phone calls I have received this year, I know there are a lot of questions about how we come up with the final budget, and why don't we get what the Superintendent requested in her original budget? I will use my space this month to give you an overall view of the budget process.

The budget process begins in the fall when principals and department heads put their needs down on paper. The Superintendent and her staff then take all of these inputs and produce what is known as the "Superintendent's Budget." This is a budget that will fully fund the school system's needs for the coming year. Make no mistake it contains no extras; it is a realistic budget that reflects the school system's needs. Ideally, it would be approved by the School Board and completely funded by the Board of Supervisors (BOS). Unfortunately, we do not live in a perfect world, and much iteration occurs before we reach the final numbers.

The School Board cannot raise money on its own; we are completely dependent on federal, state, and county funds. The federal government provides a small percentage of our funding; however, most of their many mandates are under-funded or not funded at all. Despite what some of our politicians in Richmond say, the state severely under-funds education. Nurses and all teachers not directly involved with teaching the Standards of Learning (SOLs) are not funded and must be covered by local funding. A recent study by the Joint Legislative and Audit Commission, the legislature's own accounting office, found that Virginia is under-funding K-12 education by as much as a billion dollars biennially. What this means to Stafford is if the schools were fully funded we would receive an additional \$22 million annually. I provide this information to you to explain why the School Board cannot always fully fund the Superintendent's budget.

After the Superintendent's budget is presented, we as individual board members meet with our BOS counterparts. From these discussions, we get a feel for how much we might expect to receive in revenues. Normally, this amount is considerably less than what the Superintendent has proposed. In an attempt to get closer, we work with the Superintendent and her staff to trim the budget. We hold work sessions with the BOS in an attempt to negotiate a budget that everyone will agree to. When we believe we are close, the School Board will adopt the budget and formally present it to the BOS.

The BOS takes our budget along with the rest of the county's agencies and distributes funds to each department. The county does not have a bottomless pit of money; it must also fund the rest of the county's government. Normally, the School Board has received 70% of the county's total budget. Hopefully, that is enough to cover our budget; however, there are years that we have had to make further cuts in the budget. The BOS has been generous to the county, and they continue to fund the new schools and give us the majority of their budget. If we are to continue having good schools, we must lobby the state to step up to the plate and pay their fair share.

I hope this gives you some insight as to the budget process and why we cannot always fund the Superintendent's budget to its full extent.

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